

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

August 21, 2020

The Honorable Ron DeSantis
Governor
Office of Governor Ron DeSantis
400 S. Monroe Street
Tallahassee, Florida 32399

Dear Governor DeSantis:

We are deeply concerned by recent reports that your administration has instructed health directors to not issue recommendations when asked for advice by school boards struggling to make difficult decisions about if, and when, to return to in-person instruction. Alarming, your administration gave this directive even as the Florida Department of Education [informed districts](#) that they could only continue to delay school reopenings based on the recommendation of health officials. In March, Congress [appropriated \\$724 million](#) in emergency funding for Florida k-12 schools, including to prepare for, and respond to the coronavirus. We believe that in order for school districts to safely provide services for which Congress appropriated funds, you must stop the harmful politicization of critical public health decisions, rescind any directives that have been issued to health directors that they should censor themselves, and make it clear that health directors may issue informed advice without fear of reprisal.

We strongly fear that preventing health directors from making informed recommendations endangers children, teachers and staff, and high-risk members of our community by limiting the ability of public officials to make fact-based decisions. We understand that numerous health officials have said they [were pressured](#) by your administration to not give a formal recommendation about whether to reopen schools. Consequently, without guidance, we understand some district officials [have said](#) they felt compelled to return to in-person learning despite concerns about the potentially harmful impact on public health. School board members are not health experts and we believe that it is unreasonable to assume that they are equipped to make these decisions without guidance, which is why school boards traditionally have turned to health directors for advice whenever their community's well-being is in question.

We are especially concerned by your administration's unprecedented pressure campaign in light of the fact that the number of Covid-19 cases in children has [more than doubled](#) in the past month and there has been an [uptick](#) in the number of children treated for multisystem inflammatory syndrome, which has been tied to COVID-19. We fear that reopening schools too early or without proper precautions in place could endanger children as well as the broader community by facilitating the spread of the virus.

Florida [became a global epicenter](#) of the COVID-19 pandemic in July. We strongly believe that now is not the time to silence experts or to place political considerations above health concerns, especially when the safety of our children is at stake, and that it is critical that health directors can freely and fully advise school boards during this unprecedented crisis.

Sincerely,



Frederica S. Wilson
Member of Congress



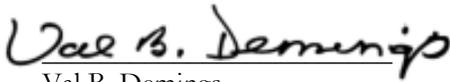
Alcee L. Hastings
Member of Congress



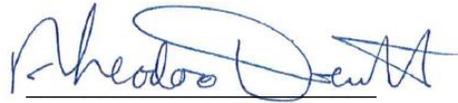
Kathy Castor
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